

Four Children

Contributed by [No More Deaths/No Más Muertes](#)

Source:

It is traditional in a Passover Seder to discuss ‘the four children’, each of whom has a different outlook on what Pesach means to them. Please include the traditional four children here if you would like. In this Haggadah, we will present four questions about immigration frequently asked by those who are unfamiliar with the reality of the Borderlands and how we can address those questions. Traditionally, we answer the questions of the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child, and the child who does not know how to ask. For our Seder, we will treat these questions as questions from the ignorant and uninformed children.

Why can't they just stay home?

David Bacon advocates “the right to stay home”: the right of all human beings to live in a place with adequate accessibility to food, water, shelter, healthcare, education, and social services (*“The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration”, 2013*). Many, however, have come to accept migration as the only solution for a livable life as a result of their exposure to extreme and unending poverty or horrific violence and the constant fear of assault, rape, or murder. Many come north from México and Centroamérica literally running for their lives from gang-related violence and extortion or from crippling poverty and economic suppression that has robbed them of their own means of subsistence. As Carlos García says, “We are refugees of climate change, the global economy, war and violence. We came here because we had no other option,” (*“9 Phrases the Migrant Rights Movement Needs to Leave in 2015”, Puente Arizona*).

Why can't they just enter legally?

The legal immigration process in the United States of America is explicitly designed to restrict and make legal migration as difficult as possible. Even in credible fear cases where migrants are applying for asylum due to fatal gang violence that has directly targeted their close family, asylum is rarely approved by the immigration judge. Immigration cases, unlike US criminal cases or civil suits, do not involve a jury, and it is up to a judge’s sole discretion whether or not the defendant wins any temporary or permanent status in the US. Thomas Roepke of El Paso and Howard Rose of Houston, who both hear asylum cases, have an 100% denial-of-asylum rate, and many judges deny >90% of the cases they hear (*“Judge-by-Judge Asylum Decisions in Immigration Courts FY 2007-2012”, Syracuse University, by way of Shalini Thomas of El Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project*).

Even when you’re in the US already, acquiring a legal status can be even harder. The Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement is currently processing applications for residency in the US from 1994. A woman who I lived with for a while told me that she has been waiting ten years for her residency application to go through. At any point she could be picked up and deported for not having “proper permission” to be in the US. Carlos García points out that “the immigration system was designed this way. Current immigration enforcement policies are an expansion of the rampant criminalization of people of color and serve to feed the mass incarceration beast, especially private prison companies which lobby for policies and laws that fill their coffers at the expense of our people,” (*“9 Phrases the Migrant Rights Movement Needs to Leave in 2015”, Puente Arizona*).

Don't illegal immigrants take “our” jobs and hurt the economy?

“Undocumented immigrants pay taxes every time they buy gas, clothes or new appliances. They also contribute to property taxes—a main source of school funding—when they buy or rent a house, or rent an apartment. The U.S. Social Security Administration estimated that in 2013 undocumented immigrants—and

their employers—paid \$13 billion in payroll taxes alone for benefits they will never get. They can receive schooling and emergency medical care, but not welfare or food stamps." *"10 Myths About Immigration", Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2011*

As has been said many times, many undocumented folks do jobs that the vast majority of US citizens wouldn't ever imagine doing: crop harvesting, livestock handling, landscaping, line-cooking, or construction. Philippe Legrain argues that, while migrants to the US are frequently employed, their presence also creates jobs. "They create jobs as they spend their wages because they create extra demand for people to produce the goods and services they consume; and they create jobs as they work, because they stimulate demand for complementary workers...thus, while the number of immigrants has risen over the past twenty years, [the US's] unemployment rate has fallen," (*"The Case for Open Immigration: A Q&A with Philippe Legrain"*).

Isn't this country of immigrants and built by immigrants?

Carlos García has an excellent response to these questions: "The United States of America is a settler colonial nation that has been built upon the lands and the genocide of indigenous people...This country was built by the slavery of African people and the exploitation of oppressed people from across the world." (*"9 Phrases the Migrant Rights Movement Needs to Leave in 2015", Puente Arizona*)

Adapted and compiled by Julian Cranberg